

County mulls cut in hours

Supervisors will vote on shorter work week

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SANTA CRUZ — A measure to save money by closing county offices Friday afternoons is expected to be approved today by county supervisors.

But a local anti-tax group says there's a better way. The Friday closing was proposed last Tuesday by the county's top administrator, Susan Mauriello, to help stanch an expected \$4.7 million flood of red ink in the county's \$229 million budget.

The closing would mean a 7.5-percent pay cut for nearly all county employees, but could save the county some \$646,000 between now and June 30, the end of the budget year. Without the closing, Mauriello said, the county would have to raise taxes or lay off as many as 170 workers.

But local tax activists say some \$1.45 million a year could be saved by cutting such management perks as car allowances and expense accounts.

Another \$3.5 to \$4.5 million could be saved, according to Ed Mazenko, of the antitax group ACTIV, by using a sliding scale to cut its payroll.

"The flat 7.5-percent pay cut would be unfairly harmful to those on the lower end of the pay scale," Mazenko said. He suggested pay cuts ranging from 2 to 20 percent. Employees in the \$20,000-per-year range would see cuts of 2 percent under the plan, while top officials in the \$100,000-per-year range would have 20 percent slashed from their salaries.

Car allowances cost the county some \$590,000, Mazenko said, even though more than 100 of the car allowances were converted to salary. Like other county employees, some 300 top and middle managers re-

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ceive 11½ holidays per year, sick leave and vacation pay. The county also picks up the cost of full medical benefits for employees and their families.

But those 300 managers also receive, Mazenko said, \$600 per year in expense allowances, \$300 for "additional medical expense allowance," and up to \$4,500 each per year in administrative leave bonuses.

Altogether, he said, it adds up to a \$1.45 million tab for taxpayers.

County officials said they've heard Mazenko's suggestions before.

Benefits are a recognized part of the compensation package, said county analyst Pat Busch, ranging from tool allowances for Public Works employees up to educational allowances received by him and Mauriello.

The county's 300 managers work hard, Busch said, and their paychecks are in line with what is

paid to counterparts in other Bay Area governments. And compared to the types of executive salaries making the news in private industry, he said, "they're not in the same league."

"It's just unpleasant to have them beat on about being overpaid when they're not," he said.

County managers are willing to take the same 7.5-percent cut being proposed for nearly all the county's 2,000 employees, Busch said, but Mazenko's proposal singles them out. "I don't think that's fair."

Busch warned of the consequences of eliminating the benefits altogether.

"Do they really want a \$50,000 CAO?" he asked. "Do they really want a \$50,000 sheriff, or a \$50,000 District Attorney? ... I don't think you would see the same quality people doing the job."

Those jobs now are in the \$100,000 range, not counting benefits.

Some of Mazenko's proposals echoed comments made last week by Aptos supervisor Walt Symons.

Before employees lose pay across the board, Symons said, the board should first eliminate car allowances, travel and conference expenses and lunch accounts.

San Lorenzo Valley supervisor Fred Keeley said Symons' comments were divisive. The county's budget problems, Keeley said, are related to the state's economy and to the state budget.

"I think it badly misses the point to act as if we can solve these problems by engaging in class warfare within the county budget," Keeley said. "The issue is both bigger than that and more important than that."

Symons countered Monday that the county's budget woes can't all be blamed on the state budget.

"It is not all the fault of Proposition 13, folks," he said. "It's called S-P-E-N-D-I-N-G: spending."

Nevertheless, Symons said he'll

probably support Mauriello's recommendations today. Some of the items are included in employee contracts, he said, and would have to be negotiated with unions.

Meanwhile, county officials continued 11th-hour meetings Monday with representatives of the county's largest employee union. Last week, supervisors postponed a vote on the Friday closing after a string of union leaders complained that no one had talked to employees about it.

What was decided in those meetings, however, won't be known until today's board meeting. County officials decided not to release any information on those meetings before Mauriello makes her report to the board.

Monday, Mauriello underlined the point of the cuts.

"This is intended to save jobs and to save services," Mauriello said. "... Having 37-hour employees and more of them is better than 40-hour employees but less."

Merchants angered by plan